

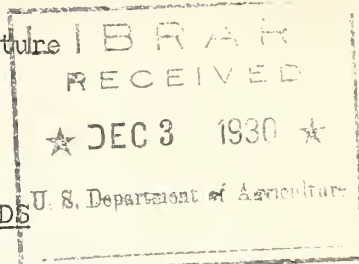
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WINTER FEEDING OF UPLAND GAME BIRDS

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Unusual Present Situation

Well-fed wild game birds rarely if ever die of cold, even in the most severe weather of our northern winters. Starved or half-starved wild game birds, however, do die in great numbers during severe weather. Drought in 1930 in many regions has greatly reduced food supplies available to upland game birds, and it is essential that farmers, sportsmen, hunters, and bird lovers do all they can to provide food where the usual supply is deficient. Indications are that conditions this winter may become the most critical for the birds in many years.

Partly as the result of drought, the corn crop this season is the shortest in nearly 25 years. In certain sections consumption may be nearly up to total production before spring, in which case the usual supplies of standing and shocked corn left as surplus in the field will be unavailable to game. The last shocks may be hauled from the fields at the very time when game birds are in most need of food. There also has been a partial to complete failure of many natural game foods locally over much of the country.

For these reasons it is extremely urgent that the thousands of farm boys and men who like to hunt, assist game birds on their properties as much as possible. It is urgent also that State game commissions, game wardens, sportsmen, and game-protective organizations cooperate with farmers in providing labor, feed, and funds, particularly in the emergency period of the late winter.

The many thousands of dollars spent in stocking areas with game and in protecting the native species represent the principal of a large investment. Unless this is adequately protected by providing feed for the birds this winter, unquestionably in many sections there will be little surplus, or interest, next year.

Most starvation of game birds is cumulative, the result of short rations over considerable periods of time rather than for a few days only. Consequently, the situation will not be much relieved unless feeding also is carried on over rather extended periods. Intermittent feeding accomplishes some good at certain times but is not so effective on the whole as systematic feeding. The scattering

of shelled grain from airplanes is generally unreliable, wasteful, and of short effectiveness, as grains spread in this way sink rapidly into loose snow or are soon covered by drift or fresh snows. Consistent regular feeding is far better than spectacular stunt methods.

Effective Methods of Feeding Upland Game Birds

(1) Leaving Standing Corn.--It is ordinarily difficult to obtain uncut and unhusked corn standing on the stalk late in winter. Where it is to be had it provides food at all common snow levels, the uppermost ears becoming available to the birds as the snow deepens. It also provides considerable cover. Standing, unhusked corn is perhaps the ideal source of supply of winter food for game birds in most northern States.

(2) Shocked Corn.--Shocked corn left near thickets, woods, or swamps is almost as good as standing corn for feeding game birds in winter, and even better if the shocks are rebuilt for the purpose. Game birds will utilize the shocks for refuge as well as for food if these are opened up to form a sort of tepee, within which the birds are safe from their larger enemies. Unless occasional shocks are opened up, feeding fields removed from good cover may serve to put game birds at the mercy of goshawks and other marauders. It is generally advisable to have the shocks within 70 yards of woodland, grape tangles, raspberry thickets, or other cover. Game birds vary, however, in degree of reluctance to leave such protection; Hungarian partridges often take feed far from any considerable cover, whereas quail keep close to it. In some cases it may be necessary to move shocks and place them nearer the natural haunts of the game birds to be fed.

If any considerable numbers of game birds are feeding on corn in shocks, the exposed ears are soon completely shelled, and then the birds are unable to reach food. Care should be taken to have enough unshelled ears exposed at all times. Unless a great number of shocks are at hand it is necessary to open up regularly those made available to the birds. After snow or sleet storms the ears may become coated over so that birds can not reach them. It is important to check up on the situation regularly, particularly after storms.

The farmer who still has a field of standing corn that he intends to "hog off" or turn cattle into can feed near-by game birds easily by fencing off a small corner of the field so that stock can not get to it. The corner nearest thicket, woodland, or swamp is ordinarily the most suitable. Sportsmen and individual hunters are often glad to provide labor and fencing materials for this purpose.

Fields of standing corn, even though they have been harvested, often contain here and there nubbins, or poorly developed ears, or even good ears that have been missed. Such fields are of considerable service to game birds if left over winter.

(3) Providing Grain in the Sheaf.--For use in feeding game birds it is occasionally possible to obtain sheaves of wheat, buckwheat, oats, or other grains stored in barns for late threshing. Such sheaves can be set upright in the snow or hung by wire or cord from limbs of trees so that the birds can reach them by jumping.

(4) Opening Strawstacks.--Strawstacks frequently contain considerable waste grain and weed seeds. Almost all such food on the surface of the stack, however, will soon be eaten. The regular opening up of strawstacks in the field can be made an effective means of feeding upland game birds, especially if coupled with some use of threshed grain.

(5) Manure Spreading.--It is a common practice on many farms to haul fresh manure from the barns to the fields daily, scattering it over the snow. Considerable grain is often made available to birds in this way. By making it the practice to haul manure daily and to throw some supplementary threshed grain upon it in periods of severe weather, farmers can contribute greatly to the welfare of the game birds of the region.

(6) Shelter Feeding.--Shelter feeding is also effective. The tepee or lean-to type of shelters, made of branches, cornstalks, boards, or other materials, can be set up in such manner as to provide protection from falling and drifting snow, and shelled grains can be scattered within. In providing such shelters where advantage is taken of natural retreats as grapevine-covered fences, berry patches, and similar places, they are especially effective. Care should be taken to see that shelters do not constitute traps where birds can be cornered by cats, dogs, goshawks, or other enemies. It is safer for the birds if openings are left from which they can escape in case of attack.

Best results will be obtained by placing shelters in natural game coverts, rather than by attempting to entice game into barnyards or too far into the open. In any event it is inadvisable to feed game birds with domestic poultry, or where poultry manure has accumulated, as many diseases and parasites are easily transmitted between barnyard fowls and game birds.

Regularity of supply is exceedingly important in shelter feeding. Birds do not forget places where food is abundant and will return to them in emergency if the supply is dependable.

(7) Feeding Ear Corn.--Ear corn furnishes one of the best means of providing an emergency food supply for the birds. It may be stuck on sharpened sticks, fastened to low-hanging branches, wired to fences, hung from bushes by strings, or tied within reach of birds anywhere above the snow level. A board with several nails driven through it, on each of which an ear of corn is impaled, can be set upright in the snow where game birds need food. The board can be reset after heavy snows.

(8) Providing Oyster Shell and Grit.--It is advisable to scatter both grit and oyster shell with feed, as there may be a deficiency of these materials where the ground is covered with snow for long periods.

Winter Damage by Upland Game Birds

Occasionally upland game birds become heavily concentrated on some field near excellent cover, with the result that they destroy more grain than the individual farmer can afford to spare, even though he is willing to donate a reasonable supply. Where these concentrations are of semi-migratory species, which may have left the property before the advent of the hunting season, there is often real cause for complaint. In most cases of this kind, State game commissions are willing to provide reasonable compensation after an inspection has been made and the facts verified. Sportsmen's organizations also are generally willing to purchase additional grain for the birds. Farmers invariably take a great interest in feeding the ordinary numbers of game birds found on their properties, and are glad to assist in promoting their welfare. In unusual cases, however, where the burden becomes severe, the game commission, sportsmen's clubs, or humane societies can be approached for assistance.

Types of Feeding Adapted to Particular Species

Standing corn and corn in the shock are very satisfactory for practically all upland game birds in the Northern States, including quail, pheasants, Hungarian partridges, prairie chickens, and sharp-tailed grouse (as well as for many miscellaneous song birds and for rabbits, squirrels, and deer).

Open pit feeding, or shoveling down to bare earth and constructing windbreaks of snow or other materials to prevent drifting, is good for Hungarian partridges, for such winter field birds as longspurs and snow buntings, and occasionally for most upland game birds, depending upon the locality.

Shelter feeding is particularly adapted to quail but is also suitable for other species, if shelters are large enough and placed with the needs and habits of the bird in mind.

Ear corn set on stakes, fences, or branches or made available in other ways is adapted for feeding practically any game or other grain-eating bird. This is also true of most small grains that can be obtained in the sheaf.

It is altogether inadvisable, wasteful, and ineffective to scatter loose grain upon soft snow.